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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000128

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CE; NEA/ELA
NSC FOR SHAPIRO

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [LO](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA SEEKS CONSULTATIONS PRIOR TO ASAD VISIT

REF: A. A. STATE 20919
[B. B. STATE 20388](#)
[C. C. 07 BRATISLAVA 661](#)

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eddins, reasons 1.4 b and d

[1](#)1. (U) This message contains an action request in para six.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: In the course of a meeting to deliver ref a points on Syria, Ambassador Klara Novotna, head of the MFA's Middle East Directorate, informed Charge that President Asad would visit Bratislava, April 28-30. The visit was described as a joint initiative with the Austrians, whose President visited Damascus in December 2007 shortly before President Gasparovic (ref c). Reacting to Charge's points, Novotna described Slovak and U.S. views on engaging Syria as highly consistent. The Slovaks are anxious to consult with us on the Asad visit, beginning as early as possible, to ensure that the Slovak leadership delivers a well-coordinated message. With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian track, Novotna expressed grave concern about Israeli plans to demolish 100 homes in East Jerusalem and asked if the U.S. would engage on this issue. End Summary.

[1](#)3. (C) Novotna welcomed ref a points during a March 13 meeting with Charge, stating that Slovakia is "cautiously" hopeful about the potential for progress on the Syrian track. Novotna said the MFA is following very carefully recent U.S. engagement with the SARG, particularly as the MFA has begun preparations for a visit of President Asad to Slovakia at the end of April. According to Novotna, Asad will meet with President Gasparovic (his counterpart), but will also be received by Prime Minister Fico. In the run-up to the meeting, Novotna said that she and MFA Political Director Igor Slobodnik would like to consult with the Embassy about the messages. They would like to meet as early as March 19 or 20, if possible.

Israeli-Palestinian Relations -----

[1](#)4. (C) Tana Halaszova, Novotna's deputy, confirmed that the bulk of Slovakia's Sharm al-Sheikh 66,000 Euro (84,097 USD) pledge would be directed to UNRWA (ref b). Another component would be for health care, to include bringing Palestinian children to Slovakia for medical treatment and sending medical supplies to Gaza. Novotna was interested in Senator Mitchell's plans to engage with the presumed Netanyahu Government, once in place, and urged the U.S. to take a strong stance against the ongoing demolition of Palestinian homes. She welcomed Secretary Clinton's earlier comments on the issue.

Embassy Comment and Action Request -----

[1](#)5. (C) It appears the MFA intends to play a much more

assertive role in the planning and preparation of Asad's visit than it did when President Gasparovic traveled to Damascus in 2007 to visit Slovak troops deployed in the UNDOF mission. This is a positive development. Novotna is one of the most dedicated and serious Slovak diplomats currently serving in Bratislava, and it's clear she feels a responsibility to get the visit right. Because the December 2007 meeting with Asad was the "price of admission" for Gasparovic to visit the Slovak troops, the meeting was treated largely as a courtesy call staffed by the President's office and thus lacked substance. Although the U.S. and Israeli Embassies lobbied the Slovaks to include points on human rights, Lebanon, and terrorism in the discussion, we know from subsequent readouts that Gasparovic treaded very lightly. It was also clear that President Gasparovic was charmed by the Syrian president and came away with a favorable impression of Asad and a desire for further engagement.

¶6. (C) As far as we know, the upcoming visits to Austria and Slovakia will be Asad's first trip to Europe since his visit to Paris last year, so it is important that the Slovaks send the right signals. Recognizing that U.S. policy toward the SARG is still evolving, we request points for use in discussion with senior MFA officials as they prepare for the visit. We believe the Slovak MFA would be quite receptive to including U.S. desiderata in their briefing materials for Gasparovic and Fico. It might also be useful if Department could facilitate the release of appropriate Syria-related intelligence and analysis to the Slovaks, so that they can have a fuller picture of Syria's role in the region. Finally, we have spoken with Embassy Vienna and both

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embassies believe that if any NEA officials are visiting or transiting Vienna in the coming month, we could arrange fruitful consultations with our host governments in advance of the Asad visit, offering the Slovaks and the Austrians an authoritative Washington perspective on Syria.
EDDINS